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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the reform content and specific teacher learning conditions that enabled teachers at an urban California elementary school to find ways to examine the effects of their practices on students and to reflect on the values and beliefs underlying their practices. Over 5 years, a professional culture of inquiry developed, as required by state legislation that built explicit practitioner inquiry into the restructuring of participating schools. Teachers at the school developed multiple forms of inquiry activity, and each form of inquiry created different conditions for learning. The three forms of inquiry that were identified were: (1) whole-school assessment of learning outcomes; (2) small-group action research projects; and (3) individual reflection with small group support. The variation in learning opportunity was vitally important to the school community's ability to address the issues of race and equity that were central to their capacity to support the learning of all students. Different conditions enabled teachers to focus on different units of analysis and change and to gain knowledge and skills related to different problems and questions. (Contains 2 tables, 1 figure, and 27 references.) (SLD)

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"WHEN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT RACE, YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE"

TEACHERS LEARNING ABOUT RACE AND EQUITY THROUGH DIVERSE FORMS OF INQUIRY

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If there is any social phenomenon that embodies the root dilemma of American society and its democratic ideals, it is the phenomenon of racial/ethnic difference. In no quarter have Americans developed a discourse of race and its meanings that embraces multiple realities of experience, including multiple meanings about the nature and function of schooling. The teachers at Rogers Elementary school—where I conducted the research reported in this paper—found themselves in the position of trying to invent such a discourse. They struggled to find ways to talk about race as frankly with colleagues of different ethnicities as they talk about race with people of their own background, and they struggled to move beyond the usual scripts of compensation, victimhood, separatism.

They found themselves in the position of confronting the meanings of race in school because of the convergence of several facts. Student achievement in their school (like that of most schools which enroll students from diverse backgrounds) was patterned by race and ethnicity. The teaching staff was also diverse ethnically. The teacher community valued participation by all, sought diversity of experience and voice, and genuinely embraced the ideals of social justice and the goal of equitable learning outcomes. Furthermore, the school was a participant in two reform projects that espoused goals of democratic education—in particular, the goal of equitable outcomes for students of all racial backgrounds.

This paper explores the reform context and specific teacher learning conditions which enabled teachers at Rogers eventually to find ways to examine the effects of their practices on students, and to reflect on the values and beliefs that underlay their practices. One caveat: this is a short and sweet version of events which I observed closely for five years and which is still unfolding. This paper makes what the school staff created, and underwent, seem quite clear. For those involved, it was usually not clear, and it was certainly not easy; it involved a tremendous amount of conflict, effort, and faith. So readers should not construe my attempts at analytic clarity as a reflection of the complicated experience of those in the school.

I. TEACHER LEARNING IN CONTEXT OF REFORM

Educators inside and outside of schools take as given that organizational conditions within most schools constrain, rather than support, teacher learning. (Barth, 1990; Cohen, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1993, 1995; Elmore, et al., 1996; Fullan, 1993; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Newmann, et al., 1996). As Roland Barth put it, "schools are seen as places where children learn and adults teach" (1990:50.) Some school practitioners, with the support of progressive reform initiatives, are addressing that problem by attempting to build new habits of mind and processes of critical inquiry into their work as individual teachers and as school communities (Lieberman, 1995; Little, in press; Szabo, 1996). These reformers assume that ongoing teacher learning is crucial not only to effective classroom practice, but also to teachers' informed contributions to restructuring schools as organizations.

Inquiry as a distinct type of teacher learning

The conventional conception of teacher-as-learner is that teachers are *consumers*—translators, instantiators—of knowledge generated by university researchers and others external to schools. Policy research emphasizes that teachers have too little access to useful knowledge and receive too little support for applying the lessons of outside researchers to their work in classrooms (see, for example, Cohen, 1990; Little, et al. 1987; Little, 1993; McLaughlin, 1991). Some of these same researchers present an additional conception of teacher learning, one that casts teachers as "reflective practitioners" (Schon, 1983, 1991) and "teacher researchers" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, among many others). This conception assumes teachers *generate* valuable knowledge from critically studying the phenomena of their own students, teaching practices, and work settings. In its more systematic, intentional versions, this is the kind of learning connoted by *inquiry*. As construed by Fullan and others, a synergy of individual practices and organizational processes of inquiry creates both moral warrant and instrumental capacity for internally-driven school change.

This paper

This paper presents a micro-analysis of conditions for teacher learning and change in one school in which the professional community embraced the notion that the best route to school improvement is critical inquiry into student learning and teaching practices. I first describe the case—the school and their reform agenda, the reform projects that supported them, and the development over five years' time of a professional culture of inquiry. I then focus in on the nature of their inquiry practices. They devised multiple forms of inquiry activity, and each form of inquiry created different conditions for learning. The variation in learning opportunity at this micro level was vitally important to the school community's ability to address the issues of race and equity that were central to their capacity to support the learning of all students.

II. THE CASE

Rogers school

Will Rogers Learning Community,[1] which enrolls 705 students, is in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District,[2] an urban district adjacent to Los Angeles, which serves roughly 12,000 students. A 50-year old neighborhood school, Rogers sits in a community that combines rent-controlled apartments housing a relatively stable population of people in poverty, upscale beachside shops, and commercial strips lined with fast food outlets and graffiti-embellished storefronts. The students at Rogers reflect the considerable socioeconomic and language diversity of the surrounding neighborhood, situated on the poorer south side of Santa Monica. Rogers enrolls a higher proportion of students of color and students in poverty than average in the district:

[1] The school's real name. I usually refer to it as "Rogers" in the remainder of the study.
[2] The district's real name.

Table 1
Ethnicity of Rogers Students[1]

	Rogers School %	Santa Monica District %
Latino	43	27
White, not Hispanic	39	52
African-American	15	9
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	8
American Indian	1	0

Thirty-one percent of Rogers students are classified as Limited English Proficient. Though they represent a total of ten languages, by far the greatest number speak Spanish. Twelve percent of the students are designated as having disabilities, and nearly 50% qualify for a free or reduced lunch. The teaching staff at Rogers is also ethnically diverse. White and Latina teachers comprise the larger groups, with small numbers of African-American and Asian teachers. Unlike many SB 1274 schools, Rogers has had a pattern of relatively low teacher and administrator turnover. The Rogers principal is an energetic, respected, and knowledgeable leader.

The reform projects

SB 1274

SB 1274, "A Demonstration of Restructuring in Public Education," provided $25 million annually to 144 K-12 schools for five years, 1993-97. SB 1274 came on the heels of a series of state reform efforts aimed at standards and curriculum, and to a lesser extent, professional development. SB 1274 aimed to "deal more deeply with the processes of teaching and learning" by giving "staff and parents the flexibility and authority they need to reorganize their local schools" (Institute for Education Reform,1996: 3). SB 1274 held schools accountable to changes in six domains: curriculum and student assessment, accountability systems, professional collaboration, decision-making, technology, and program evaluation (Szabo, 1996). Given this demand to overhaul "everything *and* the kitchen sink" (Szabo interview), CCSR leaders were concerned that the state's initiative could become another exercise in over-attention to structure and under-attention to the core purpose of schooling—student learning.

Working from the notion that "the missing link in the restructuring equation is a robust 'culture of inquiry'" (Szabo, 1996: 76), the California Center for School Restructuring (CCSR) built explicit practitioner inquiry processes into the restructuring work of participating schools. The concrete mechanism used to initiate inquiry practice in SB 1274 schools was a structured, inquiry-based public presentation format called the "Protocol." In performing a Protocol at annual gatherings of all SB 1274 schools, school teams were to specify "critical questions" related to their "examining student work," and to present an analysis of samples of student work which emphasized the extent to which "ALL students are habitually experiencing" (or not)

[1] 1996-97 demographic data.

positive outcomes. This protocol process was an important contributor to the shape that teacher inquiry took at Rogers school.

District reform project

In 1994-95, the Santa Monica district initiated a new district-wide reform effort, funded by a grant from the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP). A core activity was to build systematic reflection on practice into the work of teachers by forming voluntary "inquiry groups" in school sites. These would meet in "structured, bi-weekly dialogue sessions," with the help of a "critical friend" from outside the school. District leaders believed that inquiry would enable principals and teachers to focus on the values and beliefs that underlie instructional practices. And they believed such a focus was necessary to solving the problem that plagued the district, which was unacceptable variation in patterns of academic success across racial groups.

Rogers as "existence-proof" of reform principles and goals

The Rogers staff set out intentionally to bring to life the professional practice which Judith Warren Little characterizes succinctly as the "systematic, sustained, and collective study of student work--coupled with a collective effort to figure out the roots of student work in the practices and choices of teaching" (in press, p. 3). From early in the grant period, CCSR leadership regarded Rogers as an exemplar of a restructuring school that embraced practitioner inquiry practices as a form of learning (Szabo, 1996). Furthermore, The staff at Rogers took to heart the social justice goals underlying this initiative. From the perspective of school orientation and access to external supports, Rogers represents a "best-case" from which to glean lessons about practitioner inquiry as a distinct kind of teacher learning in reform context.

Evolution of professional culture of inquiry at Rogers

Over five years' time, the professional culture of inquiry at Rogers evolved slowly and fitfully with a combination of supports from the grant projects and the efforts of those in the school.[4] During the period, the Rogers staff developed what I call twin capacities of a culture of inquiry—normative capacity and technical capacity. I define normative capacity briefly below, then move to a more in-depth discussion of technical capacity, which is my focus in this paper.

Development of normative capacity

The professional community at Rogers created a normative context for inquiry practice imbued with twin values of 1) **critical will** to call into question practice at the level of core beliefs and principles; and 2) **collectivity of effort** to learn and change from self-study. Collectivity of effort is generally more characteristic of well-developed, active, collaborative teacher learning communities inside schools than of teacher research groups

[4] There were important contributors to this evolution that I do not address in this paper. They included development of many sources of leadership within the school; the technical, normative, and financial resources of the reform projects; and the effects of the momentum the school staff gained over time in learning through inquiry.

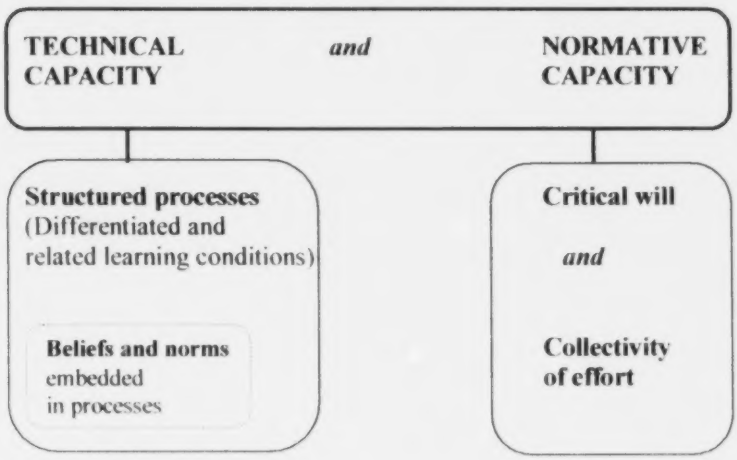
in external networks (such as the National Writing Project), where the emphasis is typically on individual teacher investigation with collegial support (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Goswami & Stillman, 1987; Miller & Martens, 1990; Mohr & Maclean, 1987). The critical will to call into question core beliefs and principles is more typical of external teacher research groups (and consistent with the action research tradition) than of teacher communities in schools (Elmore, et al., 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1982; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992 McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, forthcoming; Newmann, 1996; Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986; Sergiovanni, 1992). This professional culture of inquiry in school context, then, had what I call a "values-added" normative capacity that reflected an unusual combination of values distinctive of collaborative learning communities in schools *and* of teacher research groups outside of schools.

Development of technical capacity

By technical capacity, I mean the structures, processes, knowledge and activities by which the school staff played out these norms—that is, did the actual work of inquiring into their practice. The main emphasis of this paper is on the technical capacity of this school's emerging professional culture of inquiry—specifically, the nature of the forms of inquiry that arose and the learning conditions they created. In the following section, I will discuss in detail the structured processes of inquiry identified in the figure below. The figure portrays the twin normative and technical capacities that shaped the professional culture at Rogers.

Figure 1.

Twin Capacities of a Professional Culture of Inquiry



II. FORMS OF INQUIRY AND CONDITIONS FOR TEACHER LEARNING

Three distinct forms of inquiry[5] evolved over five years' time at Rogers, and these occurred in strands of teacher (and principal) activity that spanned school years. In this section, I describe the salient features of each form of inquiry. These forms were related to one another through the school staff's overarching goals and the broad questions they were asking of themselves, but each form of inquiry conditioned teacher learning in different ways—and those differences were crucial to reform.

A. Overview

Three forms of inquiry

In one form, which I identify as **"whole-school assessment of learning outcomes,"** all the teachers in the school developed performance benchmarks, created and administered assessments, scored them, and examined the results. Teachers worked in grade-level groups to evaluate student work and talk about it. Also, a staff member created a database of all scores. This technical advance permitted analysis of the performance of groups and enabled them to display results for discussion by everyone in the school. The entire staff spent a full week of pupil-free days each February discussing these results—for example, patterns of literacy performance across grades, across years, across ethnic groups. They used the "protocol" process from the SB 1274 project to organize and conduct reflective dialogues about these results. This form of inquiry was expected and supported by the SB 1274 project.

In the second form, which I identify as **"small-group action research projects,"** grade level teams developed focused research questions quasi-independently from other groups. Groups then developed their own approaches—their own data-collection, including mini-experiments—to pursuing those questions, and prepared reports for their colleagues. These were joint studies, but at a small-group level, and they were focused more on change in programs and practices than on creation of outcome data. This form was not dictated by either of the reform projects, but rather arose organically as a descendant of the whole-school assessments, and was folded into the year-long cycle of self-study connected to the SB 1274 project.

In the third form, which I identify as **"individual reflection with small group support,"** teachers voluntarily met twice a month in intimate support groups for the purpose of critically reflecting on their own practices, with an emphasis on exploring the values and beliefs that underlay them. This form of inquiry evolved from the specifications of the district's reform project.

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[5] They engaged in many forms of learning and additional decision-making and governance activities, also. In this paper I focus only on those activities that involved critical analysis of own (collective or individual) work, or practitioner inquiry.

This system of inquiry forms evolved slowly, with considerable effort and conflict over the course of five years. The different forms arose through a process of reciprocal constitution of inquiry form and function. Teachers' particular learning purposes (the questions they asked, the units of change they focused on) drove enactment of inquiry form; conversely, the features of inquiry form (the norms, tools, processes) created conditions that served specific learning functions.

Relatedness of multiple forms of inquiry

The over-riding goal of both reform projects and the majority of teachers (and principal) in the school was to produce equitable learning outcomes for all students, specifically, to redress the pattern in which students of color had less access to academic success and advantages than white students. This compatibility in goals helped create coherence among the different inquiry activities that evolved. Furthermore—as part of their norm of working collectively—the school staff worked together in a multi-step, deliberative process annually to develop "essential questions" about their practices as a school and their effects on students.[6] These questions created a focus and sense of purpose for learning and reform that all teachers were aware of and to which many were genuinely committed. Regardless of what particular inquiry activity the teachers were involved in at a given time, then, the problem areas and goals of these essential questions lent coherence to the efforts. Thus, while teachers participated in a variety of inquiry (and other learning) opportunities, the fact that there was a collective focus meant that there was some coherence to the whole-group, small-group, and individually oriented forms of inquiry.

Differences

However important it was that a shared sense of problem underlay the different kinds of inquiry activity, it was the differences between them that helped the staff begin to get at what they really wanted to understand and change—this pattern of racial inequity. The three forms of inquiry differed in important ways along several dimensions:

Purpose: the intended purposes for engaging in the particular inquiry activity (e.g., summative assessment of student learning, or small-group analysis of classroom practice).

Process and tools: the activities and practices comprising the work of inquiry, including the specific inquiry tools or instruments. (Some inquiry processes, for example, were data-based, and others centered on personal reflection. Various instruments—test scores, personal journals, and so on—were used in different processes and for different purposes).

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[6] Sample essential questions. From 1995-96: How do we know that students, by name, are becoming literate? (Literacy = reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking); How do we analyze, reflect on, and integrate into our instructional practices what we have learned from the data that we collect? From 1996-97 What am I doing differently to ensure that the inequitable pattern of achievement no longer continues? What am I doing to ensure that parent and student voice is an integral part of instructional strategies and assessment?

Norms: the expected behaviors and professional values associated with participation and conduct of that form of inquiry (e.g., forms varied in the extent to which learning was public *vs.* private, and extent to which individuality *vs.* collectivity was valued).

This differences are portrayed on Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2.
Evolved System of Differentiated Inquiry Forms

Inquiry Form	Purpose	Unit(s) of analysis	Types of evidence	Norms	Structures	Processes/Tools
Whole-School Assessment of Learning Outcomes	Summative: • Assess/portray school effectiveness	Whole school	Quantitative (test scores), uniform over time	Public-- grade level team and whole school All participate	• Cycle of - preservice days, - semi-monthly mtgs of grade-level groups. - Mid-Year institute. - spring reflection • Computerized database	• Essential questions • School-specified but group-developed instruments (assessments, rubrics) • Data collection and analysis procedures • Protocol discourse format OR • Analyst's report
Small-Group Action Research projects	Formative: • Build deeper causal understanding • Support group-level or program-specific change • Motivate/Foster individual learning	School programs Subgroups of teachers Individual teachers	Multiple forms, mostly qualitative	Public (with discretion for privacy)-- grade level team and whole school All participate	• Cycle of - preservice days, - semi-monthly mtgs of grade-level groups. - Mid-Year institute. - spring reflection	• Essential questions • Any instruments, multiple kinds of evidence • Protocol discourse format
Individual Reflection with Group Support	Exploratory: • Foster individual learning and change	Individual teachers	Story and anecdote	Private--confidential within small group Voluntary	• Semi-monthly small-group meetings all year • External critical friend	• Free exploration, reflection • "Hard" questions • Any relevant resource

B. Inquiry form and conditions for teacher learning

In this section, I explain how the different forms conditioned teacher learning differently.

Form #1: Whole-school assessment of learning outcomes

This form entered the school community first, with participation in the SB 1274 restructuring project. Through teachers' purposeful enactment of it over time, this form of inquiry took clear shape as one that demanded whole-school participation and was data-driven. This form demanded that teachers generate and analyze evidence that would permit cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons, publicly report and discuss data, and collectively deliberate on their meanings and implications.

Learning which this form enabled and did not enable

a) did enable

Developing normative and technical capacity for this form of inquiry (which took three hard years) enabled it to serve the summative purpose of generating a comprehensive portrait of student development in literacy, what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (in press) would characterize as knowledge of practice. Because generation and examination of data involved the whole school, the knowledge the data generated was truly *common* knowledge. Over time, the staff learned a sequence of specific lessons from these data. First, in 1994-95, a systematic assessment of literacy showed that students were not reading as well as teachers had assumed based on intuitive judgement. Later, in 1996-97, they saw that across the board, students were demonstrating improvement in reading and writing as a result of the changes they were making in the program. However, when scores were disaggregated by racial groups, there was a persistent pattern of what they called "inequitable achievement."[7] They were getting better at teaching reading, on average, but they were not remedying the problem of differential achievement. Their interests shifted from pedagogy to equity, and they began to question their strategies and expectations for students of different racial backgrounds.

b) did not enable

Even when teachers inferred that new teaching approaches were called for, this form of inquiry—these data, the norms of public exposure, the process of whole-school deliberation on a pre-determined schedule—did not create conditions in which teachers could experiment with new approaches. Also, while this form of inquiry painted a picture of the status of student learning across the school, it did not provide in-depth understanding about the learning conditions of particular groups of students that may have an effect on their learning. It was a form that provided broad-brush knowledge. That knowledge provided motivation for change, but not conditions sufficient to supporting actual change processes.

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[7] Throughout the paper, all quotes attributed to school staff are taken from audiotaped interviews or field observation notes between March 1995 and June 1998.

Form #2: Small-group action research projects

Following on the capacity for generating summative knowledge from the whole-school assessment of outcomes, this second form of inquiry emerged as a descendant form of inquiry which could serve a different purpose by giving discretion to small groups wishing to carry out focused studies using various forms of evidence.

Learning which this form enabled and did not enable

Teachers' ability to use this form of inquiry for learning and change depended on the degree to which individuals in the small groups shared beliefs and norms about practice. It also depended upon the degree to which the inquiry tools that groups used were well-suited not only to the questions they wanted to answer, but also to some of their underlying beliefs. For those groups where teachers began with a threshold level of shared beliefs, this form created conditions in which groups could carry out focused studies of student learning and could experiment with new practices in a context of ongoing, supportive critical reflection. For example, teachers could experiment jointly with a new series of lessons to move students toward a grade-level writing standard, or they could try out new behaviors toward disengaged students. Or, teachers could study patterns of student learning within programs, such as bilingual instruction, to compare those patterns with whole-school patterns. These narrower studies were contextualized by the accumulated common knowledge generated by the whole-school assessments because the small group studies were connected to the essential questions, demanded school-wide participation, and had expectation of public reporting. These features gave it the advantage of fostering teacher learning that was not supported by whole-school assessment, but which did become available as part of the store of public collective knowledge.

However, because this was a data- and schedule-driven form that required public reporting of results, it did not create conditions in which teachers could work through deep-seated differences in ideologies of teaching, including those involving racial differences in student experience or teacher expectations. The following excerpt is from an interchange among teachers trying to create a joint survey of student attitudes and experiences of school. The teachers' differences of belief about student experience and teacher roles, in relation to race-based experience, were so profound that they could not make good use of this form of inquiry to build knowledge and galvanize change efforts. As you will also see, individuals in this group differed in the extent to which they gave validity to students' self-reports. That difference among teachers meant that a student survey was not an effective instrument for joint study because the survey is an instrument that fundamentally demands belief in self-report.

> T1: And I've had kids be like, 'But you weren't listening to me.' And I have to say, 'Okay, but wait a second. I was talking to the whole class.' ... But the fact is, *they're still feeling like that.* They still feel like we're not listening.

T2: But wait a minute! You know what? I think we're *coddling*. They may feel that, okay? But they've got to learn their manners! They have to know when to do that! There's no respect—I mean, we're groveling!

T1: But let's say that I am a teacher and I do that to all of my kids, like, 'Just wait. I can't talk to you right now.' Some kids might feel a little bit more strongly about that than others.

T2: They're bound to! Because every kid is different.

T1: But what if all my African-American kids feel like they can't go to me for help, but all my white kids feel like they can? And I know that I've said to my white kids, 'Just wait. I can't talk to you right now.' And that means that they're not *feeling* that. Does that make sense? I'm saying I would want to *know* if they're feeling it or not feeling it.

T2: I think if anything, we probably go overboard because we are so sensitive to African-Americans when we are white. But if you take an African-American teacher, sometimes they are much harsher on African-Americans because they want them to come up to standards. I think whites sometimes go overboard because they're afraid of being attacked. I mean, I've had classes where *they* have been pretty racist and they say, 'Oh, well, *you're* racist!' I mean, it's a sick kind of thing!

T1: I still go back to, if they're *feeling* it, it's a problem. The kids that we talk about, who say, 'Well you're always picking on me, and you're mean because I'm black!' Okay, you want to say, 'Well, how can you say that? I'm always picking on you because you're crawling under the table every single day!' But you know what? That kid still feels like he's being picked on. He still *feels* it.

T2: It's a victim response. They're manipulating you.

T3: You know, it's interesting how we're all reading so many different things into it…

For the teachers in this group, these "philosophical" differences in perspective translated into individuals' drawing different conclusions—that is, generating different knowledge—from the same set of evidence. When they finally managed to conduct a joint student survey[8], they reported: "we all interpreted the [survey] data completely differently." In retrospect, they realized that this form of inquiry did not create conditions enabling deeper exploration of deep-seated differences: "We didn't anticipate what kinds of issues would come up in the survey. It was a really emotional thing. We're all at different levels of experience dealing with these issues." The experience of framing their differences as arguments frayed their relationships, impeded individual inclination to change (because they only became more polarized), impeded their collective ability to

[8] They could only manage this by creating elaborate rules that enabled them to get the group "job" done but also make the analysis individualistic instead of collective.

change, and ultimately, limited their contribution to the school staff's collective store of knowledge.

Form #3: Individual reflection with group support

Over time, the district-supported form of inquiry became increasingly important and increasingly differentiated from the other forms I describe above, which were born of the restructuring project. This occurred as the school staff became more aware that deliberation about outcome data—however locally situated—did not necessarily foster change. They became more persuaded that the problem of "inequitable achievement" might be rooted in personal beliefs about and goals for students more than in technique per se. They thus grew more acutely aware that change strongly implicated individual practice in a way that was primarily personal. As one teacher said,

> Unlike with other topics, when you're talking about race, you're talking about people. If you talk to me about my racial practices in the classroom, you're talking about me—you're talking about my parents, you're talking about how I was raised, and my experiences as a person, and there's no way to separate that.

The principal reflected on the challenge of framing a school-wide agenda about racial equity:

> The reason it's so tough for us right now is that the questions that we're dealing with are very hard. They deal with racism, and they deal with why are we still having this uneven pattern of student achievement by racial groups? The thing we're trying to get to in these questions is personal.

Distinguishing characteristics

Although these small groups met regularly, and their conversations were facilitated by an external critical friend, this was a quite fluid form of inquiry in which teachers reflected on any problems of interest to them, with or without systematic data. They did so in a context of collegiality, but with privacy and without expectation of public reporting. Whereas the other forms emphasized production of knowledge about student learning, this form emphasized self-reflection on beliefs, experiences, and practices, that is, generation of conscious knowledge of oneself. Teachers made the distinction this way:

> The other forms are product-driven, there's work that needs to be done, whereas this can be more self-generative, more reflection, it can be very non product-oriented. So it puts a piece in that has been missing.

> [In the other groups] you can't discuss what you're feeling because there's no time. If you do, you don't get your work done. In this group people are willing to deal with things, with problems.

It was this more intimate feel that enabled teachers to "say things you wouldn't say" in other settings.

The critical friend role made an important contribution to their ability to explore difficult issues because the supportive outsider could shoulder some responsibility for upholding the norms of conversation.[9] The critical friend reinforced the legitimacy and value of what the teachers were doing, and was also a conduit of information—of books and articles—about the problems at hand. In these groups, the teachers tended not to seek out resources for technical matters of practice; rather, they read about ways in which race and ethnicity framed people's understanding of the world and experience of school. These readings were treated less as a knowledge resource, and more as permission and prompt for personal reflection. Some white teachers began to talk about the meanings of their whiteness, and teachers of various backgrounds began to say things to people of other races that, for all their lives, they had only said to people of their own race.

Learning which this form enabled and did not enable

a) enabled

The norms and processes of this form gave more legitimacy to the idea that changing practice was a complex, long-term effort involving both technical *and* moral clarity and change. Teachers who suffered from real confusion about their practice, and anguish about their beliefs, found the chance to experiment in a relatively risk-free setting—to try out new behaviors in the classroom, or to consider alternative beliefs and values about students. This form enabled individuals to create a fit between what they wanted to learn and change, and how they wanted to go about it. It fostered reflective experimentation in a setting which valued individuality and multiplicity of perspective, and which also granted individuals a personal pace of learning and change.

One teacher, for example, had discovered in her small-group action research project that she lent out reading books from her personal library to children whose parents she judged to be reliable, and did not lend her books to children whose parents may not make sure they were returned. She was unwittingly limiting the education of the most disadvantaged children. She was utterly devastated by this realization, because she feared this one example might be the tip of the iceberg in her practice. It was only in this more individualistic, more fluid form of personal inquiry that she had the time and support to continue looking systematically at her teaching behaviors and at the beliefs underlying them to the extent that she could make deep-seated changes.

This was the form in which the legitimate subjects of inquiry were the teachers themselves: not their pedagogical strategies per se, but the *root sources* of practice—the content of their own beliefs and the nature of their personal histories. Here, and *only* here, conflict was a legitimate avenue to greater understanding. It was this form of inquiry, not the others, that enabled Rogers teachers to begin, eventually, to approach the problem of

[9] Norms included: confidentiality, attentive listening, sticking with "hard" subjects, no put-downs.

inequitable achievement not as problem awaiting a technical solution, but rather as a values-laden dilemma.

b) did not enable

It would be a mistake to infer that this form enabled teachers to find clear, or collective, resolution about the most deeply difficult, ingrained problems. It was never so simple. As these teacher suggest, questioning one's deep beliefs about race took a real toll on individuals and on the groups:

> In this inquiry group we are struggling with race on a deeper level. But it's very painful, and you can't see the end, it could go on forever.
>
> ...If it's too hurtful, and too painful, who's going to want to do it? I'm not sure how long we can continue with those kinds of very emotional, deep discussions, and I don't want to say 'have them be productive' because that really sounds very mundane, but it's like, how does that help you continue to go on, and do good work?

For teachers who were personally prepared to identify and challenge deeply held beliefs, this form gave them a setting where they could undergo a truly transformative experience. For teachers who were not prepared to question whether their personal beliefs were consistent with the espoused goals of equity, this form did not provide for that kind of experience. And for all teachers, this personal reflection brought about considerable anguish. This inquiry form, in other words, created learning conditions that they felt were necessary to addressing the problems they identified, but those conditions were not a panacea.

Beyond that, teachers felt varying degrees of success with linking inquiry in this form to change at the level of the school. On the one hand, this form of inquiry gave teachers a chance to approach school level decision-making more thoughtfully. When issues emanating from school governance council entered into conversation in these groups, the norms of this inquiry process enabled teachers to grapple with multiple perspectives: "During all this discussion, we're being philosophical, and we're delving into issues, and this prepares us better to take issues back to the school. We've thought about the issues, we're more prepared to look at different sides." On the other hand, when individuals created radical change proposals within these groups, they sometimes found it difficult to extend those proposals to the level of whole-school consideration. Whole-school issues found their way into this discourse, that is, but some individual/group issues struggled to get out of the confidential group and onto the whole-school agenda. For this reason, some teachers remained deeply frustrated that whole-school deliberation could remain at least somewhat immune to personal insights about racial inequities.

III. INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING, REFORM, AND THE CHALLENGE OF EQUITY

I turn now to some thoughts about what all of this might suggest, in the context of the questions guiding our discussion today:

a) What is the significance of teacher belief, expertise, and learning in the pursuit of ambitious school reform targeted at teaching and learning
b) What is the significance of a reform environment for stimulating or suppressing teacher learning? How is that environment organized to foster and focus teacher learning?

Diverse forms of inquiry can support whole-school reform

The **differentiation** of inquiry form at a micro level was important because the particular components of different forms (the processes, tools, norms,) created **diverse learning conditions** for teachers. These different conditions enabled teachers to focus on different ***units of analysis and change*** (e.g., the whole school, their grade level group, a specific school program, their own classroom, their personal beliefs). Also, these different conditions enabled them to gain knowledge and skills related to different ***problems and questions*** (e.g., strategies for teaching reading, contours of student achievement, beliefs about race and equity). This diversity of learning opportunity was crucial to teachers' ability to learn something of value within the context of a whole-school change project because that reform context compels teachers to take into account a variety of problems and be responsible for multiple units of change.

Comparison of learning conditions created by different forms reveals ways in which the nature of teachers' learning goals interacts with the norms embedded in different inquiry processes. As the school staff's collective attention turned away from technical matters of practice toward the problem area of racial equity, their attention turned to individual beliefs and teaching practices as the new subjects of inquiry. This changed the *learning challenge*: they were studying themselves—not only their techniques, but their worldviews and identities. They were also inquiring into an inherently more complex problem area. Matters of pedagogy are uncertain enough, but problems of racial experience and equity in education are inherently more difficult.
Furthermore, the inquiry tools themselves (journals, surveys, tests) and the research process in which they are used, have embedded within them demands for certain beliefs about what counts as knowledge (student statements, teachers' self-reports, test scores), and for certain norms (privacy, individuality, autonomy, and so on). There is a greater chance of teacher learning when there is a good fit between inquiry tools and processes, teachers' questions and learning goals, the context of teachers' norms and beliefs and their capacity to evolve, and the internal and external organizational structures available to support learning and change.

Development of teachers' "collective autonomy" as practitioners and change agents

One of the most vexing tensions in any approach to school change is the relationship, and the interplay, between the individual and the collective. Little and McLaughlin, for

example, point out that teachers are at once individual "artisans" and members of professional communities within (and beyond) their school organizations. Fullan (1993) makes the sensible claim that self-renewing schools foster inquiry-based change agentry via "a dual approach working simultaneously on individual and institutional development" where there are "institutional counterparts" to individual learning opportunities (12). McLaughlin and Talbert's research shows that membership in an active professional community (often an informally organized one) which supports a "technical culture"[10] enables individual teachers to build their repertoires of practice and adapt to changing students (McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, forthcoming). Little also discusses the benefits to teachers of working jointly on problems of practice and the benefits to schools of teachers jointly assessing student work (Little, 1982, 1990, in press). These studies contribute to our understanding of ways in which collective learning enhances individual practice, and collective inquiry can advance school change. However, they stop short of portraying specific activities or processes that enable teachers to focus their learning (in particular their inquiries into practice) on multiple problems and units of change in the context of a whole-school change effort, **and** to manage the inherent tension between the interests of the individual and of the collective.

The technical system of inquiry which Rogers school developed offers an example of how multiple forms of inquiry-based learning created conditions for teacher learning and change that are consistent with Little and McLaughlin's powerful notion of "collective autonomy," in which a balance is struck between interests and needs of individuals, and the collective judgement and authority of the group. The whole-group assessment of performance, for example, informed collective judgement and motivated some experimentation with classroom practice, but it created almost no opportunity to question deeply held beliefs or address interpersonal conflict. Both the action research groups, and the individual reflection groups, created opportunity for small-group and individual inquiry into practice and related matters. These forms contributed to discourse habits that sometimes improved whole-school decision-making and, very importantly, created a place for teachers to make personal sense out of the data generated from the assessments. Rogers' inquiry technology thus balanced collective and individual authority and development of judgement, both laterally (across individual teachers) and also vertically (across levels of analysis, from individual to school).

The "realness" and emotional power of inquiry-based knowledge

One question this study raises is whether the tremendous effort (underplayed in this paper, but spelled out in the full-length case account) that went in developing this capacity for learning through inquiry was "worth it." Did this approach to learning contribute to reform? Thus, a simple but important observation: Teachers did develop knowledge they valued from their own efforts to understand student achievement. Furthermore, knowledge which teachers generated for themselves through inquiry differed in significant ways from their own tacit, intuitive knowledge

[10] By technical culture, they mean one that is imbued with the values and habits of collaboration around technical matters of teaching practice. Such a culture may or may not include established processes of systematic self-study and knowledge generation of the kind I describe in this case.

and from knowledge they acquired from other sources. Inquiry-generated knowledge had the effect of feeling more "real" (more believable, immediate, and inescapable) and powerful because it was simultaneously more valid, more laden with emotion, and more imbued with moral weight than other kinds of knowledge. For example, while teachers had access to *information* about race-based patterns of achievement from other sources, such as standardized test scores, it was only when they generated the evidence themselves that they treated the knowledge as *real*; and by discussing it together, they built it as *common* knowledge.

This knowledge did not come without a price, however. What the teachers learned from self-study was laden with emotional content, especially guilt. In his analysis of teachers' emotions, Hargreaves claims "guilt is the central emotional preoccupation of teachers" (1994: 143). Teachers feel guilty when they feel they are not living up to their own moral-professional ideals. At Rogers school, the teachers' sense of their moral purpose as educators was concrete, immediate, and present in their relationships with their students, not merely an abstract social ideal. Thus, when they generated knowledge of student learning and of their treatment of students—knowledge which was more valid than other forms of knowledge, and which showed that they were not living up to their moral ideal of ensuring that all children succeed in school—they felt guilt and anxiety. Furthermore, the knowledge that teachers developed was often incomplete, in that it rarely produced clear implications for change. This combination of realness, emotionality, and incompleteness usually motivated further learning and change, but sometimes caused paralysis or resistance.

Inquiry-based learning in relation to school reform

Even if we can demonstrate that teacher learning is necessary to school reform, and that inquiry into practice seems to be one necessary kind of teacher learning, and—as this case suggests—if we can demonstrate that multiple forms of inquiry may be necessary to knowledge production and change, it is still the case that teacher learning is related to school improvement in complex and probably uncontrollable ways. Schools are political organizations. At Rogers, evidence gained from an inquiry activity helped individuals and sub-groups formulate positions from which they could argue for any of a number of reasonable actions. That is the normal role of social science within a democratic society (Levin, 1975). Data do not provide answers about the most intractable social problems, including those in schools; rather, they give fuel to a meaning-making process in an organizational context characterized by ambiguity and conflict. Furthermore, a school community is running against the grain when it works to foster norms of collectivity necessary to a unified improvement project. The effort to preserve those norms against the continual threat of factionalism and individualism can also mediate the relationship between teacher learning on the one hand, and actions to change teacher behavior and school structure on the other.

Inquiry, reform, and the challenge of racial equity

There is a real question about the extent to which people sharing membership in an organization can fruitfully negotiate the terrain of deepest individual differences in meaning and reality. In discussing the role of individual frames in sensemaking, Karl

Weick (1995) includes a passage from James Boyd White's book *Justice as Translation* (1990), in which White argues against the ability of organizations to survive individuals' expressions of their most fundamental individual differences. I include a full paragraph here because the example speaks squarely to the Rogers teachers' predicament (the emphases are my addition):

> Each of us loads any expression with significances that derive from our experience of language and of life, an experience that is obviously different for each of us...Think here of conversation and life on a law school or college faculty [or, I would add, a public school faculty]. We can if we are lucky create a world that we can inhabit with confidence and some comfort, upon which we can build much of our lives. Yet despite the sense we sometimes have that the shared world of meanings in such a place is permanent and natural, at moments we see that even this world will be maintained only by perpetual and imperfect negotiation. It can always collapse; and at its most healthy much of its meaning is radically different for its different members, and different in ways that can never find expression. For one person the school may be a refuge, for another a cosmic challenge; for a devout Catholic the whole process could have meaning of a kind it could not have for an atheist; and so on. *Part of maintaining a community is maintaining the agreement not to speak or ask about the ways in which its language means differently for different members.* And those differences can be so enormous that in listening to the talk one is often surprised that it can go on at all. (pp. 35-36 in White, 1990; pp.106-07 in Weick, 1995).

In contrast to this hypothetical college faculty who agreed "not to speak," the teachers at Rogers made an effort to "find expression" for profound differences in their experiences with race in relation to education. These were differences in their personal experiences of being schooled, differences in their reasons for becoming school teachers, differences in their hopes for children. In particular, the teachers of color made the effort to speak out of conscious awareness that *not to speak about different meanings of school signaled implicit support of a system which produced (and tolerated) inequity*. Teachers of color and white teachers alike also spoke out of the belief that *not* to speak was an inclination stemming from white privilege, that is, the privilege white people enjoy (as the dominant group) to choose whether to take multiplicity of race-based experiences seriously. At the same time, Rogers teachers were aware that the dialogue they groped toward did have the potential to break the relational bonds they valued, and which they believed were necessary to their goals.

The great likelihood that school faculties who critically examine their own practices will encounter the problem of racial inequity extends a challenge to practitioners and school reform enthusiasts alike. While it may be difficult enough to foster development of schools' technical and normative capacities to engage in inquiry, it may be an even greater challenge to support schools in creating and sustaining a discourse about the *implications* of what they learn. In particular, it will be a challenge to support teachers in determining whether—and if so, how—to "give expression" to differences of experience and meaning that affect their collective approach to the teaching of children.

Clearly, these are questions that beg for further research. Researchers typically report on the ethnic diversity of students as a demographic fact. It remains out of the ordinary, however, to report the ethnic diversity of the teaching staff, either as demographic fact *or*, more importantly, as context of deliberation about schools goals and routes to improvement. Further research would not only produce more knowledge about the diverse meanings and perspectives practitioners bring to their work, but it may also create more legitimacy for a practitioner-centered discourse about the meanings of race and schooling.

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